

Introduction

Research shows that positive character traits help students thrive in school, and develop into happier and more successful adults. These traits, including respect, cooperation, honesty, and integrity, serve as a type of moral compass that your child will use throughout his or her life to navigate personal, professional, and social situations. While many schools are successfully implementing character lessons into their curriculum, the main place students learn to act with positive character is at home.

Table Talk

Intentionally lead conversations you have with your teen towards issues of character. Try not to appear judgmental or superior, but allow your teen to express his or her thoughts and feelings about the importance of good character in his or her life.

1. Why do you think your friend/teacher/classmate acted like that?
2. What could you have done to help?
3. Do you think that was the right thing to do? Why?
4. How did that make you feel?

Tips & Tricks

- **Be a role model.** Teenagers pay more attention to actions than words. Make sure you aren't just talking about good character but also living out your words.
- **Don't be a helicopter parent.** Teenagers—and adults—develop character when they experience things first-hand. Allow your teen space to make his or her own decisions, and expect him or her to live with the consequences.
- **Praise your teen.** Teenagers still need positive reinforcement from you, even if they aren't always willing to acknowledge that they do.
- **Don't be afraid of punishment.** If you have clear rules for how your teenager should act and he or she disobeys, a suitable punishment shows him or her that poor character traits (disrespect, irresponsibility, dishonesty, etc.) have consequences.

Plan & Practice

There are many activities you can do with your child to help him or her develop good character. Here are a few things you can try:

- Use technology as a platform to discuss character. When watching TV shows with your teen, discuss whether the people portrayed show character. When you notice a good article or video online, forward it to your teen and then discuss it later. Try to pick items on topics which would interest your teen.
- Consider finding somewhere to volunteer as a family. Showing concern for others is central to good character. Every community has numerous opportunities across a large spectrum of interests. Here are a few ideas: Help out at a local soup kitchen, assist efforts to keep your town green, volunteer to teach new immigrants, or sign up to run in a fundraising race.

Learn More

Check out the following websites for more information on how to help your teenager develop positive character traits.

- **CharacterEd.Net**
<http://www.charactered.net/>
Click on the *Parent Notebook* for tips on teaching your child about character. The site contains informational articles, suggested activities, and lists of other resources. It is designed for parents with children of all ages.
- **Barron Prize for Young Heroes**
<http://tabarron.com/young-heroes/>
Author T.A. Barron started a national prize for extraordinary young people in 2000. Pursue this site to find stories of teens with character that you can use to inspire your own teen.
- **How to Raise Children Who Bounce When They Fall**
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/robashghar/2014/01/24/scraped-knees-can-americans-raise-children-who-can-bounce-when-they-fall/?ss=forbeswoman>
This article discusses the need to allow our children to take risks and be vulnerable in order to develop resilience and character.